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AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The claims in this listing will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

LISTING OF CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A next process-determining method, comprising:

digitizing a sample object into digital sample data;

compressing the digital sample data into compressed digital sample data having a predetermined data format;

calculating a difference ~~data-amount~~ value between a ~~data-amount~~ size of the compressed digital sample data and a ~~data-amount~~ size of reference data formed by digitizing and compressing a reference sample object in the same manner as the sample object is processed;

identifying which of a plurality of predetermined numerical ranges the difference ~~data-amount~~ value corresponds to; and

determining a predetermined process associated with the identified numerical range in advance as a next process to be carried out.

2. (Currently Amended) A next process-determining method according to claim 1, wherein the digital sample data is compressed into the compressed digital sample data having the predetermined data format by using a data-compressing method ~~capable of compressing an amount of data at a higher rate as digital data of an identical kind occurs more continuously, or as the digital data has a higher regularity~~ in which an